

FINDINGS: Systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief continue in Pakistan. Religiously discriminatory legislation, such as the anti-Ahmadi laws and blasphemy laws, foster an atmosphere of intolerance. Sectarian and religiously-motivated violence is chronic, and the government has failed to protect members of religious minorities from such violence and to bring perpetrators to justice. Growing religious extremism threatens the freedoms of expression and religion or belief, as well as other human rights, for everyone in Pakistan, particularly women, members of religious minorities, and those in the majority Muslim community who hold views deemed un-Islamic by extremists.

In light of these severe violations, USCIRF again recommends in 2010 that Pakistan be designated a “country of particular concern,” or CPC. Since 2002, USCIRF has recommended Pakistan be named a CPC, but the U.S. State Department has not followed that recommendation.

The religious freedom situation in Pakistan remains deeply troubling, with further deterioration possible due to the actions of religiously-motivated extremists, some of whom have ties to Al-Qaeda or to the Afghan Taliban. The current Zardari government has taken positive actions to promote religious tolerance. However, the government has failed to reverse the continuing erosion in the social and legal status of members of religious minority communities and in the ability of members of the majority Muslim community to discuss sensitive religious and social issues freely. A number of Pakistan’s laws abridge freedom of religion or belief. Anti-Ahmadi laws discriminate against individual Ahmadis and effectively criminalize various practices of their faith. Blasphemy laws have been used against members of religious minorities and dissenters within the majority Muslim community, and frequently result in imprisonment on account of religion or belief and/or vigilante violence. The Hudood Ordinances—Islamic decrees predominantly affecting women that are enforced alongside Pakistan’s secular legal system—provide for harsh punishments for alleged violations of Islamic law by both Muslims and non-Muslims. Anti-government insurgents espousing an intolerant interpretation of Islam continue to impose a harsh, Taliban-style rule in areas under their control. The government’s response to religiously-motivated extremism remains inadequate, despite increased security operations. Pakistan also continues to promote the flawed “defamation of religions” concept at the UN, which would undermine the freedoms of religion and expression internationally.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS:□ Promoting respect for freedom of religion or belief must be an integral part of U.S. strategy in Pakistan. The forces that threaten Pakistani and U.S. security interests are largely motivated by a violent extremist ideology that rejects international human rights standards, including freedom of religion or belief, for both Pakistan's non-Muslims citizens and members of the majority Muslim community. The U.S. government should clearly state its concern for religious freedom as an essential element in U.S. policy in Pakistan; urge Pakistan to reinforce the rule of law and to bring its laws, particularly those regarding blasphemy and the Ahmadis, in accordance with international human rights standards; urge Pakistan to halt its international promotion of the flawed "defamation of religions" concept; and urge Pakistani authorities, including at the provincial level, to promote respect for human rights and religious tolerance in public education. Additional recommendations for U.S. policy toward Pakistan can be found in the 2010 Annual Report chapter on Pakistan and by following this link: <http://www.uscifr.gov/images/ar2010/pakistan.pdf>